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By JOSEPH P. LORENZ

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A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance. And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives [James Madison to W.T. Barry, August 4, 1822].

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EGYPT AND THE NEW ARAB COALITION

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By JOSEPH P. LORENZ

AS THE ECONOMIC and political balance among Arab states has shifted over the last twenty years, as alliances have come and gone and attitudes toward Israel have moved from confrontation toward negotiation, the Arabs have convened periodic summits to confirm the changes and turn them into common policy. These meetings are the mileposts of modern Arab diplomatic history. At conferences in Khartoum, Rabat, Baghdad, and Fez, new bearings were set in Arab-Palestinian relations and the conflict with Israel. This past year, in Amman and then in Algiers, two summits were held that illuminate the changes in attitudes and power relationships that have taken place in the Arab world since Camp David.

The recent summits are important not only for the decisions they took—the solid front shown to Iran, Egypt's return to a position of Arab centrality, and the support pledged to the Palestinian uprising. Their longer term significance lies in the emergence of a new dynamic in inter-Arab relations: on all of the controversial issues, a new, centrist Arab coalition dominated the decisionmaking process.

The appearance of this coalition raises a number of questions. Is the growing sense of common interest among Arabs a product of the Gulf war, or are deeper and more enduring factors at work? What issues does the moderate consensus embrace and what are its limits? How strong are the underlying bilateral relationships, especially those between Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Iraq? Is the Arab-Israel peace process likely to be affected? And what impact will the Palestinian uprising have on the move toward the center?

Arab Nationalism

Iran's proprietary interest in its Gulf neighbors concentrated Arab attention on what is important to the common interest and what is not. The net effect of the war in the Gulf—along with the Mecca demonstrations and Iranian probing in the smaller sheikhdoms—has not been so much to create new configurations in the Arab world as it has been to accelerate a trend that has been under way for several years. It is a trend toward greater realism, less rhetoric, and a more serious search for common ground. It comes as a result of fundamental changes in the two spheres that most directly affect Arab relationships: the first has to do with ideologies and attitudes, the second with strategic relationships and power.

The eclipse of secular ideology as a driving force in Arab foreign relations has been apparent for more than a decade. Pan-Arabism and Ba'athism—even pan-Islam in the midst of an Islamic revival—have not only ceased to shape foreign policy but have lost even their mythic function of justifying policies based on state or personal power. Nationalism alone remains, and for most Arab countries it is increasingly a pragmatic, economically oriented nationalism without much sentimental overlay.

Contemporary Arab attitudes toward pan-Arabism are especially instructive. If Arab unity as a serious political objective is dead—and it doubtless is—more real interest exists in policy coordination, among a broader spectrum of Arab countries, than existed at the height of pan-Arab fervor. Partly this is because Arab solidarity no longer necessarily means doing things Egypt's way. The main components of power have been leveling in the last two decades, and this leveling has been good for cooperation. The huge growth in oil revenues in what had been the poorer Arab states led to a leap forward in literacy, higher education, and governmental and diplomatic expertise. And while this was going on, Egypt increasingly turned inward, striving to break out of the vise of burgeoning population and limited irrigable land.

Egypt's bowing out of Arab politics has never been a question; Egypt could hardly do so if it wished. It has the largest

population in the Middle East and the biggest standing army, a central and strategic location, continuing—if diminished—cultural preeminence, and a reservoir of teachers, technical experts, and farmers who serve by the millions in the oil-rich but population-poor Arab countries. Yet Egypt is not the regional colossus it once was, attracting or repelling its neighbors by its sheer weight and dynamism. The door has opened to a search for common ground among partners, based on realism and mutual self-interest.

In Egypt pan-Arabism lives on as part of the legacy of Nasser, if only as a dream. For the masses especially pan-Arabism is a dream that grows brighter as the years pass, a vision of Nasser as the voice of all Arabs and protector of the dispossessed. The continuing power of Nasser's name is shown by the formation of an active new political group that calls itself Nasserist and publishes a newspaper entitled *The Voice of the Arabs.* Populist and left-wing in orientation, this group attracts people who are repelled by the atheism of the traditional left. Despite the name of its newspaper, its message is based on a version of Nasserist economic socialism rather than on any serious program for Arab unity.

For many thoughtful Egyptians, some form of integration persists as a realistic long-term goal for countries with economies as complementary as those of the Arabs. Egypt's growing ties with its neighbors are seen as building blocks that could lead to association into larger economic units and perhaps, over time and with careful preparation, to political federation. As a former Egyptian foreign minister put it, "Where there is capital in the Middle East, there's no know-how, and where there is know-how, there's no capital. The real hope of the region is a marriage of the two—not for ideological, but for practical reasons."

Other Egyptians maintain that a compelling reason for Arab integration is the imbalance in demographics and resource distribution that exists between Egypt and its immediate neighbors. Libya and the Sudan have the water and the irrigable land, Egypt the people to farm it. And a long history of close association among the three countries makes some sort of economic federation seem like a realistic long-term

objective. Moreover, as growing numbers of landless *fellahin* pour into the already overcrowed Egyptain cities, finding them work becomes critically important to the social, economic, and political health of the country. One safety valve that is already in place is the migration of farm labor to the region's other great river valley: hundreds of thousands of Egyptian farmers now work the fields of Iraq.

The pragmatic drift of Egyptian thinking is evident in the changing attitudes toward Sadat as well as Nasser. If there is little desire to return to Nasser's pan-Arab activism, neither is there much bitterness left toward Sadat's pursuit of Egyptian interests at the expense of Arab solidarity—except, still for the left and the religious right. A frequently heard observation in Cairo these days is that although it is too soon to judge Sadat's place in history, Egyptian grievances against him had more to do with his actions at home than his foreign policies. The desire to become the center of Arab action again is great, but few would trade for it a return to the time when Israel occupied the Sinai and war seemed the only way to get it back.

What happened to the secular ideology of pan-Arabism has happened also to pan-Islam. A powerful unifying force through much of Arab history, Islam works today to keep the Arab and Islamic states apart more than it pulls them together. Iranian expansionism is of course a major centrifugal force, widening the historic breach between Sunni and Shi'ite Islam. But the eclipse of pan-Islamic ideology occurred before the Iranian revolution. What is most striking is that now, as the fundamentalist wave gathers force and threatens to engulf a number of Arab governments, there is no active pan-Islamic movement that aims to break down the barriers among Arab and Islamic states.

One reason no such movement has developed is that nowhere in the Arab world are the clerics in power. But even in opposition, the *ulama* and the lay Islamic groups are not normally hesitant to express their views, and few have called for serious steps toward Islamic unity. A number of characteristics of contemporary Islam explain their difference. First is the difficulty of reconciling the different Islamic styles and

points of view that exist from one Arab country to another. To imagine the Wahabi clerics of Saudi Arabia forming a government with the Egyptian divines of Al Azhar is as hard to envision as a harmonious coalition of born-again Baptists and Anglo-Catholics. A second divisive force is the leadership rivalries and competing interests of the national Islamic organizations—the Egyptian and Syrian branches of the Muslim Brotherhood, for example. And, Islam has for so long been used by Arab governments to further their secular national interests that the clerics have become wary of efforts to involve them in international affairs.

If there is no serious movement toward pan-Islamic unity, the religious revival nevertheless affects Arab relations in other ways. Often the impact is subtle and indirect, submerged in the overall world view of people who are both Muslim and Arab. The strands of Arabism, Islam, and patriotism are in fact so interwoven in the national consciousness that frequently no one of them can be separated out as *the* motive for a particular foreign policy.

Of all the Arabs, Egyptians are probably the most acutely aware of the tension between religious and secular loyalties. For fifty years the Muslim Brotherhood clashed violently with a succession of governments—from the Palace to the Wafd to Nasser and Sadat. And long before the Brotherhood came into being, questions of national identity preoccupied Egyptian thinkers. Was one a Muslim first, then an Arab, and then an Egyptian, or did the claims of one rule out the others? Most Egyptians think of themselves as all three, and see nothing unreasonable in doing so. They are comfortable with Nasser's image of three concentric circles, with Egypt in the center and Islam, the Arab world, and Africa in the outer rings.

One example of the indirect ways in which Islam affects Arab foreign policy is the impact that it has on policies toward the Palestinians. Most Arab policy-makers probably view their countries' Palestinian postures as a mixture of national interests in the region and the moral claims of fellow Arabs whose land has been taken from them. The Islamic perspective is different. For the devout, the expulsion of Muslims from Palestine by non-Muslims from the West is seen as a pure and simple

repetition of the Crusades. It is a humiliation that calls not only for Arab solidarity but for religious retribution. Indeed, the orthodox do not accept Arabism as something separate from Islam, but regard it as a part of Islam and encompassed by it.

Because the problem is viewed in religious terms, Muslim Brotherhood support for the Palestinians has been long standing and passionate. The intensity of its commitment, reiterated in sermons and Islamic books and periodicals, cannot help but influence the views of Arab policy-makers. And for those regimes whose main internal opposition comes from the religious right, the Islamic approach to the Palestinian problem has a more direct impact. In Syria, for example, the fundamentalist uprising of the late 1970s was due partly to the regime's fierce attacks on the PLO in Lebanon; in return, the government, responding to Islamic protests, drew back from its confrontation with the Palestinians.

In Egypt after Camp David, the effect of the Islamic community's opposition to the peace treaty with Israel had a reverse twist to it. The centerpiece of the Brotherhood's grievance was what it saw as a sell-out of Palestinian rights. Sadat's view was that he had done everything possible to advance the interests of the Palestinians as well as those of Egypt; Camp David, he believed, could at least begin the process of breaking down the psychological walls between Israel and the Arabs. This conviction, combined with a stubborn streak and disdain for the fundamentalists, worked to reinforce his commitment to peace with Israel.

The one Egyptian foreign policy issue that might appear to have been most directly affected by Islamic attitudes is the war in Afghanistan. Without question, the Egyptian regime's material and moral support for the *mujaheddin* was welcomed by the Brotherhood, and in explaining its posture, the government did stress its solidarity with fellow Muslims. But the policy almost certainly had little to do with Islamic views. Its origin lay in the mainstream of Egyptian foreign policy since independence: opposition to great power interference in the Third World, in this case to Soviet expansionism.

The Decline of Ba'athism

Of all the ideologies that have shaped Arab foreign policies, Ba'athism has come the closest to total eclipse. For nearly twenty years, beginning with the 1958 Egypt-Syria merger and ending with the abortive federation between Syria and Iraq, Ba'athism was a driving force in inter-Arab relations. Its commitment to the destruction of the artificial borders that the West imposed on the Arab world after the First World War was for many Arabs, especially those in the Fertile Crescent, a blueprint for action. Today the institution of the party remains, but the ideology has become a tool for mobilizing mass opinion and preserving the status quo.

In Iraq, even before the war with Iran, the subordination of Ba'athist ideology to the interests of the state was well under way. The war accelerated the process. One of its casualties was the Ba'athist practice of choosing allies according to their political principles—a taste that could no longer be indulged given the need for financial help from the Gulf Arabs. The pan-Arab component of Ba'athism nevertheless served its purpose: as a rationale for wartime sacrifices and a means of assailing the rival Ba'athists of Syria for siding with Iran against the interests of the Arab nation.

In Syria, as in Iraq, the Ba'athist decline paralleled a growing concern with the traditional priorities of states and regimes. Three developments contributed to the change in Syrian priorities. First, President Assad came to power with a pragmatic, almost military approach to foreign affairs that focused on achieving a reasonable fit between goals and capabilities—in operative policy at least, if not in rhetoric. Assad's contempt for ideologically based policy no doubt stems partly from his experience as Defense Minister at the time of the June War, when the Ba'athists propelled Syria into a conflict it could not win. The second development was the changing dynamic of inter-Arab relations. After Nasser's humiliation in 1967 and his death three years later, no Arab state remained with both the interest in Arab unity and the weight to move toward its achievement.

And in Syria as elsewhere in the Arab world, a new generation has reached maturity that finds the old belief systems inappropriate to its problems. Concerned with the hard realities of state-building, this generation's psychic needs seem to be more fully met by religion than by secular political ideologies. Nor are its members obsessed with the problems of the past. After sixty-five years they have become used to living in the mini-states that were carved out of the eastern Arab world and, indeed, have a stake in their preservation. As the injustices that stemmed from the Ottoman Empire's breakup merge with the others of history, so also does the frustration pass that was the moving force behind Ba'athism.

Changing Regional Interests

The Amman summit that opened the way for Egypt's Arab reintegration took place exactly nine years after Egypt was expelled from the Arab League at Baghdad for having abandoned the struggle with Israel. The Baghdad summit was as totally controlled by those rejecting a negotiated settlement with Israel as that in Amman was dominated by those favoring such a peace. Little changed during most of the period between summits. Indeed, except for Fez in 1982, holding a summit had been impossible because of the intensity of inter-Arab quarrels.

This turnabout in inter-Arab dynamics was due partly to the movement toward realism and away from the ardent ideologies of the past. But equally important was a transformation in the strategic landscape of the Middle East.

A number of developments altered the power positions of the main Arab actors and changed the ways in which they perceived their regional interests. First was revolutionary Iran's two-pronged challenge to the political legitimacy of Arab governments as well as to their territorial integrity; second was the PLO's dispersal from Beirut in 1982 and the relative quiescence of the Palestinian problem before December 1987; and third was the staying power of the peace treaty negotiated at Camp David, with its impact not only on Egyptian-Israeli relations but on Israel's interaction with the other Arabs. Still another important event was Hosni Mubarak's accesssion to

power. By removing from the inter-Arab equation the element of personal bitterness toward Sadat, the way opened for Egypt to take advantage of the first three developments.

The nature of the perceived threat from Iran varies from one Arab state to another. For Saudi Arabia, the very existence of another Islamic state that claims to represent all true believers—be it Sunni or Shi'ite—is a challenge to the legitimacy of the regime. That Iran's revolutionary Islamic republic is five times the Saudi population in size and much superior in military power heightens the danger. Yet, not until the Iranian demonstrations at Mecca sent an unambiguous signal of defiance to the kingdom's claim to Islamic leadership were the Saudis fully persuaded of the urgent need for a policy of deterrence and joint defense.

For the smaller Arab countries that face Iran across the Gulf, the threat of subversion is more immediate than the challenge to political legitimacy, although the conservative sheikhs no doubt worry about both. The Palestinians, for their part, have still another concern. They fear that the other Arabs may become so preoccupied with Iranian ambitions that they lose interest in the Palestinian problem. As Arafat put it at Amman, the Arab leaders were intent on closing ranks in the face of Iranian threats because of "the danger of this fireball rolling closer to the oil wells."[1]

The most complex of Arab attitudes toward Iran is that of Syria. Hostility toward Iraq and financial aid from Iran doubtless help to tilt Syria toward Iran. In any rational calculus, however, one would suppose those factors are offset by the smaller Syrian voice in Arab councils and the risk to more dependable sources of financial aid that the policy entails. Arabs outside Syria argue that traditional foreign policy considerations do not necessarily apply. They maintain that the more isolated the Syrian Alawite regime becomes, the greater its inclination to support hostile states on the Arab periphery such as Iran and minority groups such as the Shi'ites in Lebanon. By backing the "outs" and taking unpopular

[1] Quoted in Youssef M. Ibrahim, "An Arab Consensus Is Seen on Opposition to Iran," *New York Times*, 11 November 1987, p. A3.

positions, Damascus not only makes itself heard in Arab policy-making but avoids being drawn into peace negotiations while in a position of less than strategic military parity with Israel.

In Egypt the war's strategic consequences and its impact on the regional balance of power have been the paramount concerns. A consideration of legitimacy exists as well, but it is complex and affects Egyptian policy in contradictory ways. On the one hand, an overly belligerent posture toward Iran could have inflamed the radical religious right—even though the mainstream Islamic groups have generally (and somewhat tentatively) supported Egypt's pro-Iraq stance. On the other hand, an Iranian military victory might have galvanized Islamic resurgence and have thereby posed a much greater threat to the present system of government in Egypt.

Egypt's strategic interests clearly lie in halting the expansion of Iranian power and influence. The overthrow of conservative regimes in the Gulf and their replacement by radical, pro-Iranian governments would push Egypt back to the defensive posture from which it has just emerged. Yet, Egypt's historic competitor in the Middle East has been not Iran but Iraq. Not only has the rivalry persisted for more than three thousand years, it sank to one of its more venomous moments just eight years ago, before Iraq turned its attention elsewhere. The war had its perils, but from the Egyptian standpoint Iraq's dependence on the moderate Arabs was not one of them.

The Palestinian Issue

If the challenge from revolutionary Iran was the driving force behind the Arab world's new alliances, it was the quiet on the Palestinian front from 1982 to 1987 that opened the way for a return to practical, state-to-state policies. Several reasons explain the diminished attention given the Palestinian issue before the uprising in the occupied territories. First, the scattering of the main body of the PLO through the Middle East (much of it in the Maghreb, far from the confrontation with Israel) led to a sharp reduction in the PLO's physical power. Then the breach between Syria and the PLO after Arafat's second exit from Lebanon in December 1983 meant that the PLO had less leverage with the moderate Arab states,

just as Assad no longer had a Palestinian card to play. Finally, a widening rift between Fatah and the Damascus-based PLO elements fragmented the PLO's voice and lessened the credibility of its claim to be sole spokesman for the Palestinians.

Arab attitudes toward the PLO were also changing. As respect grew for leaders who spoke plainly and provided a better life for their people, there was a sense that the PLO was hamstrung by the need for consensus and that its leadership was becoming more interested in preserving its own position than in achieving an attainable agreement for the Palestinians.

Contributing to the PLO's tarnished image in Arab eyes was the PLO's inability to defend its people in the Lebanese refugee camps from attacks by the Shi'ite Amal. But the war of the camps did more than damage the PLO's prestige. It was a major factor in the PLO's alienation from Syria, as Naef Hawatmeh's DFLP and George Habash's PFLP joined Arafat in opposition to Damascus because of Syrian support for Amal. And it meant that Syria's already hard-pressed economy was drained further as it struggled in Lebanon with the PLO and then with the Iranian-backed Hizbollah. The upshot was a further erosion of radical Arab weight in inter-Arab councils, already being hastened in the mid-1980s by Libya's reverses in Chad and domestic strife in Democratic Yemen.

In early 1985 Hussein and Arafat agreed on principles for a Jordanian-PLO relationship in the negotiating process, and the Palestinian question again became the focus of serious diplomatic attention. The hope was that Arafat would move forward without the radical PLO elements toward negotiations on the basis of Resolution 242. It was not to be. The agreement with Hussein collapsed a year after it had been concluded, the victim of renewed PLO preoccupation with its internal problems.

At a meeting of the Palestine National Council in April 1987, the PLO succeeded in recovering a large measure of internal unity. The price, however, was high. The hardliners insisted that Arafat formally disavow the agreement with Hussein and agree to a resolution denouncing Egypt and the Camp David accords. Egypt responded swiftly, closing the PLO office in Cairo and severing contact with Arafat and other

high-level PLO officials. In light of the longstanding special relationship between Egypt and Fatah, the Egyptians were angered by what they saw as Arafat's ingratitude and Cairo's support for the PLO leadership after its expulsion from Lebanon. Seven months later, amid the scramble of Arab states to reopen their embassies, Egypt quietly let the PLO return to its Cairo office.

Just when the Palestinian question began to look like a sterile exercise in which exiled politicians maneuvered for power and foreign ministers issued white papers, the Palestinians of Gaza and the West Bank brought the problem back to life. The political inexperience of the young people in the forefront gave the uprising a spontaneity that caught the Arab imagination. And its emotional impact, especially on Arab youth and religious elements, seemed bound to grow in the absence of movement toward a Palestinian settlement.

The uprising began three weeks after the Amman summit ended. Its timing may have been affected by frustration at the indifference to Palestinian concerns shown at the summit, although there is no clear evidence that this was the case. Whatever their intentions, the insurgents returned the Palestinian issue to the priority on the Arab agenda that it had lost.

Egypt's Relationship With Israel

The settlement between Egypt and Israel negotiated at Camp David is one of the most important factors shaping inter-Arab relations, but also one of the most complex. The durability of the peace treaty has had one set of consequences, the failure of the Palestinian autonomy negotiations, another. And while Egyptians and Israelis have been responding to events and to each other, the attitudes and policies that emerged from their interaction also influenced the views of the other Arabs.

The dominant factor, however, is that the peace treaty has endured. It has survived the assassination of the man who broke with the Arab world to make it, the concerted efforts of the Arabs to punish Egypt for its conclusion, and Israel's invasion of Lebanon over Egypt's strong protests and the recall of its ambassador. Arab recognition that the peace between

Egypt and Israel is here to stay has been a psychological watershed in Middle Eastern politics. Along with the ideological and strategic factors that have been discussed, the treaty has helped to shift the Arab center of gravity toward acceptance of the need for a negotiated final settlement.

Egyptian policy toward Israel since Camp David has followed a stable pattern despite periods of frustration at what Egyptians sometimes perceive as Israel's disregard for their views. At the heart of Egypt's policy is the goal of bringing the Arab world with it into a peace with Israel. This requires constant attention to the often flickering interest of Arabs and Israelis alike in the negotiating process. Like Sadat before him, Mubarak has kept Arab concerns before the Israelis, just as he has tried to keep serious negotiating proposals on the Arab agenda.

An example of the kind of bridging role that Egypt is able to play because of its relations with Israel, the Arabs, and the United States occurred in the spring of 1988. After Saudi Arabia's purchase of Chinese missiles had been revealed, Israeli officials were quoted as advocating their removal by force. On 24 March, Cairo's *Al Ahram* carried the announcement from an official source that "Egypt would consider any Israeli aggression on Saudi Arabia as an attack on Egypt, to which it would respond with force and determination." The same day Mubarak reportedly told journalists that an Israeli attack would "blow up the entire peace process." Then on 4 April, after the Israelis had moderated their tone, Field Marshal Abu Ghazala expressed satisfaction to reporters at Israel's "appropriate reaction" to Egyptian and US representations. It seems fair to conclude that Egypt saw the episode as highlighting for the Saudis and other Arabs of the importance of the Egypt-Israel connection.

There is no way of knowing whether Egyptian views have or have not determined Israeli policy in any given situation, but certainly they strengthen the hand of those arguing for greater attentiveness to Arab concerns. In times of Middle East tension, one more factor that Israeli decisionmakers must take into account is the impact of Israel's actions on its relationship with Egypt.

The question of how much attention to pay to Egypt has become part of a longstanding Israeli debate about the relative importance to Israel of the states on the periphery of the Middle East versus those at its core. Some Israelis maintain that the peace treaty with Egypt should, in logic, change the old theory that the periphery (Iran, Turkey, and Ethiopia, for example) should be cultivated to balance the hostility of the core. They believe that peace with Egypt made real the possibility of better relations with the core, at the same time that the Iranian revolution was making relations with the periphery far more problematic. Israel can exploit the opportunity, they argue, by taking Cairo's views seriously.[2]

Israelis are divided about the implications for them of Egypt's return to a central position in Arab affairs. Some fear that the process could radicalize Egypt, causing it to reintegrate militarily with the other Arabs. Others believe that Arab acceptance of the one Arab nation that negotiated directly with Israel can only be to Israel's advantage.

The implications for Israel of an emerging centrist Arab bloc have also been the subject of lively discussion among Israelis. Some, like former Foreign Minister Abba Eban, believe that a revolutionary change is taking place in the Arab world, in which the Arabs "may be on their way to changing their struggle with Israel from one about legitimacy to a pragmatic argument about interests and territory."[3] Eban regards the Amman summit as the continuation of a process that Sadat began ten years before when he visited Jerusalem. He is concerned that Israel may fail to grasp the nature of that process and, in doing so, miss an historic opportunity to move toward peace.

[2] One proponent of this view is Aharon Yariv, former Chief of Israeli Military Intelligence and now Director of Tel Aviv University's Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies. Yariv described his position at a seminar on 10 December 1987, which was sponsored by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

[3] Thomas L. Friedman, "New Attitude of Arabs a Challenge, Eban Says," *New York Times,* 17 November 1987, p. A10.

The stabilizing effect of the peace treaty and the parties' commitment to it is offset by the failure of the Camp David accords to stimulate a negotiating dynamic on the Palestinian issue. That failure not only undercuts the forces working for Israel's acceptance by other Arab moderates but saps the Egypt-Israel relationship of its vitality. No other issue has the same potential to turn Egypt and Israel back to a position of belligerency.

Sympathy for Palestinian aspirations has been a persistent current in Egypt since 1936, when a cross section of the politically aware elements of society pressed the Wafd government to support the Palestinians in their uprising against the British. Egypt's Islamic groups have a special affinity for the Palestinians, and Mubarak clearly has no intention of ignoring those groups. He has on the contrary tried to draw them into the country's established political institutions, to the point that Muslim Brotherhood members now dominate the opposition in the People's Assembly.

Nonetheless, the average Egyptian is likely to regard the Palestinian issue with less commitment and more ambivalence than either the religious right or the secular left. He is exasperated by the infighting in the PLO leadership and, after four major wars with Israel, has little patience with Arabs who instruct Egypt in its obligations to the Palestinians. And yet, as an Arab, he cannot help but feel drawn to the Palestinian people and their struggle for justice.

The Mubarak regime has shown itself sensitive both to the inflammable nature of the Palestinian question for key opposition groups and to the unwillingness of ordinary Egyptians to have their country's policies subordinated to the interests of the Palestinians or anyone else. When all is said and done, however, the question of Egyptian support for the Palestinians at a time of crisis or serious danger may be one of the few issues in which public opinion could bring the Mubarak government to take measures it would rather avoid.

Signs of Change

Three signposts in the mid-1980s pointed the way to the Amman summit and its decision that one Arab state's peace

with Israel need not rule out good relations with the others. The first, and most important, was Jordan's resumption of diplomatic relations with Egypt in September 1984. The move cost Jordan little; with the exception of Syria, there was hardly a ripple in the Arab world. The close relationship that developed between Egypt and Jordan nudged the regional balance of power further toward the center. Egyptian support enabled Hussein to pursue an independent policy on the peace process that was considerably ahead of the Arab consensus.

Another sign of growing self-confidence among the moderates was the decision by Morocco's King Hassan to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres in July 1986. The meeting was consistent with Hassan's longstanding, behind-the-scenes efforts to encourage an Arab-Israel accommodation, but this time Morocco acknowledged its role openly. Although Syria broke relations with Morocco, it was alone in doing so.

The third signpost on the road from Baghdad to Amman was Egypt's return to full membership in the Islamic Conference Organization at a summit held in Kuwait in January 1987. At the opening of the meeting, Syria challenged Egypt's participation but was overwhelmingly defeated. Later, Arabs and Africans alike assailed Libya for its intervention in Chad. The fact that many of the conferees were from Africa, where Egyptian diplomacy had been extremely active in the post-Camp David period, probably contributed to the moderate, pro-Egyptian atmosphere of the session. Mubarak arrived early at the summit to consult with other heads of state, and when it was over, he made a brief, but triumphal, tour of the Gulf.

Egypt's Pursuit of Arab Reintegration

Mubarak's use of the Islamic summit to cement Egyptian bilateral relations was one example of Egypt's versatile diplomacy in the mid-1980s. If the goal of Egyptian diplomacy was the swift resumption of sound economic and political relationships with the moderate Arabs, its style was to project a public posture that was correct, aloof, almost detached. It was a mix that encouraged the trend toward centrism that was already under way.

Beneath the surface, the policies of Mubarak and of Sadat had much in common. They shared an assumption that the rest of the Arab world had no choice in the end but to follow Egypt's lead. The difference was that whereas Sadat nursed a sense of personal betrayal that boiled over into public recrimination, Mubarak approached the differences with the Arabs with the same dispassion and plain speaking that mark his style on every issue.

Four more-or-less distinct lines of strategy can be discerned in Egypt's pursuit of Arab reintegration. First was the creation of special relationships with the countries critical to Egyptian objectives—Jordan, through strong support for King Hussein's initiative for an international peace conference and cooperation in military and strategic matters; Saudi Arabia, through perhaps the most outspoken defense in the Arab world of Saudi handling of the Iranian demonstrations at Mecca; and Iraq, through unqualified political backing in the Gulf war and the provision of advisers for its army, manpower for its farms, and about one billion dollars a year in arms sales for its military force. A second, related strand of Egyptian policy was the systematic development of a network of bilateral relations with the great majority of Arab states, gradually isolating the handful that remained opposed to normalization.

The third element of strategy was to put Egypt squarely in the Arab mainstream on matters of Arab-wide importance. Egypt's vigorous support of the Gulf states against Iran was the most striking example, but also significant was its support for the Palestinians on a number of issues and its defense of the PLO leadership against efforts to divide it.

The fourth ingredient was not so much a strategy as a facet of the Egyptian temperament, but that ingredient had real consequences affecting the previous three. To a marked degree, national pride governed the making of foreign policy: the Egyptians consistently declined to apologize for the Camp David framework or the peace treaty with Israel. Later, Mubarak's refusal to make the least concession in exchange for Egyptian participation in the Algiers summit was to slow the pace of reintegration. But Egypt returns to the Arab

community with its obligation intact and its peace with Israel an accepted fact of international life.

That some of Egypt's regional policies hastened its return to the Arab world does not mean those policies were not strongly embraced in principle. Certainly that is true of the tilt toward Iraq. Policy-makers and ordinary Egyptians alike view the threat from revolutionary Iran as real. Indeed, as far as one can tell, there is little sympathy for Khomeini's revolution except among the most radical Islamic fringe groups. After the Mecca rioting, for example, the Muslim Brotherhood—after a period of soul-searching, it is true—publicly condemned the Iranian demonstrators and supported Saudi actions to suppress the violence.

Yet to assume that any inclination to commit Egyptian troops to the conflict exists would be a mistake. Fifteen years after the last war with Israel, the desire for peace and the opposition to the use of Egyptian armed forces outside the country except in defense of vital national interests remain as deep as ever. Moreover, for the current generation of military leaders, Nasser's ineffectual intervention in Yemen during the mid-sixties was a formative experience. And, moving troops and equipment abroad quickly without a large air transport capability is still a practical problem.

Despite these constraints, Egypt has what Field Marshal Abu Ghazala publicly described as a vital security interest in preventing Iraq's collapse and the extension of Iranian influence to the shores of the Red Sea. The conclusion of a military cooperation agreement with Kuwait in December 1987 reflects this interest. Given the opposing forces on its Gulf policy, Egypt would probably consider direct military involvement only if the threat was imminent and Egypt was publicly asked to contribute to a multinational Arab force.

If there is one point on which all Egyptians agree, it is that the country's first priority is to build a healthy, prosperous society at home. Because the government's Arab policies are driven largely by practical economic and financial considerations, they appear to be widely accepted, even by much of the opposition. In the last two years, Arab tourism to Egypt increased by one-third; financial aid from Saudi Arabia and

Kuwait reportedly began to flow again in substantial amounts; and some three million Egyptians working in other Arab countries continued to send home remittances to eleven or twelve million family members. Despite falling revenues in the Gulf states, the anticipated forced return of large numbers of Egyptian workers does not seem to have occurred although a substantial drop in new hiring has.

The days of an Egyptian mission to unite the Arab world or singlehandedly bring peace to the Middle East have passed. The government's pursuit of tangible national interests both reflects popular sentiment and reinforces it. Yet the current climate of opinion is in no way isolationist; Egypt's pragmatic self-interest is seen to include a leadership role that is commensurate with its real weight in the region.

Egypt's Important Arab Relationships

By the mid-1980s Cairo had developed, through careful spadework, reasonably good relations with every Arab state except Syria, Libya, Democratic Yemen, and Algeria. The absence of formal diplomatic relations with most Arab countries did not cramp the growth of busy Arab interest sections in Cairo or large Egyptian missions in the Arab capitals. Of the smaller Arab countries, the Gulf states, led by the United Arab Emirates, were the most active in seeking close links with Egypt. Their interest in Egypt's Arab reintegration seems to have grown in proportion to their sense of vulnerability to Iranian invasion and subversion.

Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq provided the driving force for Egyptian reintegration at the Amman summit. For the first time in modern history, these three key Arab states were united with Egypt in opposition to Syrian policy. How this will affect Syria's approach to the Gulf war and the Middle East negotiating process is too soon to say. Certainly it is the kind of configuration that Syria has in the past done its best to avoid.

Of all of Egypt's Arab relationships, the strongest was forged with Jordan. Bilateral ties now span a broad range of activities, including a growing number of joint business ventures and trade links which give depth to the relationship. As noted earlier, the new relationship has benefited both

countries. For Mubarak it meant that one of the region's most skilled practitioners of diplomacy was at the service of Egypt's Arab reintegration. For Hussein it meant increased weight in Arab councils. With Iraq and Egypt behind him, the king had more room to maneuver in the peace negotiations and less need to worry about Syrian and radical Palestinian views. The association with Egypt fulfilled what is perhaps the guiding principle of Jordanian balance of power diplomacy: of the four major eastern Arab powers (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Iraq), at least two, and if possible three, must be friendly to Jordan.

The support of Saudi Arabia was less obvious but equally important to Egypt's Arab reintegration. Setting aside the rivalry of the Nasser era and the bitterness of the recriminations with Sadat after Camp David was not easy. Sooner or later reconciliation was probably inevitable in view of the many interests shared by Cairo and Riyadh, but the process would have taken much longer had it not been for the kingdom's compelling need to have the Arab world's largest standing army behind it. At Amman, although careful to avoid confrontation with Syria and Libya, the Saudis were in the forefront of the movement to overturn the Arab League ban on diplomatic relations with Egypt.

Egypt's important Arab relationship with Iraq has been the one most closely tied to the war in the Gulf. The relationship will doubtless continue to be strongly affected by the Iran-Iraq connection, especially if the Gulf cease-fire does not lead to verifiable arms limitations and a lessening of the long-term threat from Iran. For unless and until that happens, Iraq will be in no position to offend its conservative Arab supporters or reassert its claims to Arab leadership. Reasons of state aside, eight years of fighting may have an even more fundamental impact on Iraq's regional policies. Like Egypt after its many years of conflict with Israel, the Iraqi regime may be compelled by popular sentiment to turn away from foreign ventures and concentrate on internal reconstruction and development.

Already Baghdad has moved from total rejection of Israel. Saddam Hussein's statements and the positions taken

by Iraq at Arab meetings are close to the mainstream Arab position favoring a negotiated settlement on the basis of the land-for-peace formulation in UN Security Council Resolution 242—although Iraq has not formally accepted that resolution.

Saddam Hussein has clearly indicated that Iraq would not oppose any solution that the PLO accepted, including confederation with Jordan. Soon after the Palestinian uprising began, he met with Mubarak and Arafat in Baghdad for talks which, according to the Iraqi press, involved the coordination of Palestinian policy. If Iraq should in fact work with Egypt and Saudi Arabia to strengthen the mainstream elements of the PLO, the long-term prospects of the centrist coalition will improve.

The Algiers Conference

In early June 1988, Arab heads of state met in Algiers to coordinate support for the Palestinian uprising. Since the conference was concerned with the issue that speaks most directly to Arab emotions, it provided a different perspective from Amman, where the focus was on practical measures to counter a common threat.

To almost everyone's surprise, Egypt was not invited to the summit by its Algerian hosts. Six months after Amman, Algeria was alone with Libya, Syria, and Lebanon (the latter following Syria's lead in foreign policy) in not having reestablished relations with Egypt. It seemed improbable that Algeria, with its own Arab leadership aspirations, would isolate itself with the two Arab countries that sympathized with Iran and were at odds with the PLO leadership. In truth, the Algerians could not have relished the prospect of their summit being used as a launching pad for Egypt's return to the Arab League. Yet the real reason for Egypt's absence seems to have been less a matter of policy than that of unwillingness by both Egypt and Algeria to make the least concession to the other.

Before the summit, the Algerians asked that Egyptian Foreign Minister Abdel Meguid pay a visit to Algeria, after which the two governments would announce the resumption

of relations.[4] Egypt viewed the request as a condition to renewed relations and refused to consider it. Various efforts followed to break the impasse, but neither party would bend. As the summit got under way, Mubarak flew off to Baghdad to consult with Saddam Hussein on matters of Gulf security. If a message was intended, it probably was not lost on the conferees in Algiers.

At the conference itself, two controversial issues arose that shed light on the evolution of the power competition between centrists and militants. The issues had to do with who should disburse financial aid to the insurgents and how the US initiative for renewed negotiations for a Palestinian settlement should be treated.

The PLO's apparent goals were to win Arab endorsement of its exclusive right to distribute funds and to obtain a commitment of $300 million to $400 million a year to sustain the uprising. King Hussein vigorously opposed Arafat's bid for power over the West Bank Palestinians. His case was helped by the main donors' desire to retain some control over how their aid was used and through whom it flowed. In the end, the PLO was treated as one of several channels for the distribution of funds.[5] And to assure a continuing moderate voice in support of the uprising, a policy guidance committee was set up, comprising Algeria, Syria, the PLO, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Bahrain, the last four constituting a majority.

The PLO suffered another setback in the amount of aid that was to be set aside. The donor states declined to be bound by the conference to a specific sum. Shortly after the summit, however, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait committed $50 million to be used by the PLO over a six-month period.

Arafat reportedly mounted a major campaign to have the summit reject outright the American peace proposal, which Secretary of State Shultz had that same week been pressing in Israel, Jordan, and Syria. Clearly the PLO had concluded

[4] Cairo's *Al Akhbar* of 2 June 1988 carries the official Egyptian account of the episode.

[5] Youssef M. Ibrahim, "Arab Declaration Falls Short of P.L.O. Demands," *New York Times,* 10 June 1988, p. A6.

that the plan diminished its status by emphasizing the roles of Jordan and the indigenous Palestinians in the negotiating process, rather than treating the PLO as the Palestinians' sole legitimate representative. Algeria, Libya, and Syria joined the PLO in the attack, while Saudi Arabia led the effort to keep the door open to the American initiative.

The upshot was a decision to criticize the US initiative by inference, mildly in the communique, more harshly in the resolution. The resolution rejects "partial and individual solutions ... which deny all basic rights to the Palestinian people." Clearly there was no consensus that the United States disengage from the peace process; in fact, the centrist states seemed to regard American involvement as reinforcing their position, even if they disagreed with parts of the proposal.

Beyond these two controversial topics, the heads of state were largely content to stay with the formulations worked out in Fez and Amman. Iran, however, was not forgotten. Iranian "aggression" was roughly condemned, and total solidarity was pledged to Iraq—with no objection from Syria.

The Momentum for Centrism

Although the PLO did not attain its major objectives in Algiers, concluding that this represents a lessening of its influence in the occupied territories would be a mistake. What the summit reflected was inter-Arab relationships and conference dynamics, not the state of relations between the PLO and the insurgents. In fact, the PLO—helped by Israel's policy of deporting emerging, popular leaders from the West Bank and Gaza—seems to have captured the allegiance of much of the indigenous leadership. In doing so the PLO strengthened its position at the expense of Jordan, leading King Hussein to withdraw from active engagement in the search for a Palestinian settlement.

Yet these shifts seem inherently unstable. They depend on the uprising itself—on the political direction it takes, the leaders it produces, and the doors it opens for a peaceful settlement. If an overt indigenous leadership is allowed to develop and conditions come to favor serious negotiations, the insurgents will take a hard look at their supporters before

deciding which of them can offer the most practical and effective assistance in ending the occupation.

Moderates and hardliners alike were brought together at the summit by a common sympathy for the Palestinian cause and for those striving to advance it in the occupied territories. On the controversial issues, however, the moderates held their ground; the movement toward a centrist coalition seemed, if anything, to gain impetus from the conference.

Common attitudes and strategic interests continue to draw the centrist states together, and expanding bilateral ties give muscle to their association. The momentum seems bound to carry the coalition beyond the collective security requirements of the Gulf war to cooperation in other areas of common concern.

The most important of these areas is the Middle East peace process. Here serious limits exist on what the moderates can accomplish even if, as seems likely, Egypt returns soon to full Arab League membership. Because the Arab configuration now breaks down into a dominant majority favoring negotiations on terms that Israel might reasonably be brought to accept, and a minority that rejects such negotiations, one might expect that the centrists would use their weight to bring about a common Arab negotiating position. They may in fact try to do so. But they know from experience (most notably from the pre-Geneva consultations of 1977) how powerful a minority becomes when it believes its vital interests are threatened. If the centrist coalition succeeds in bringing Syria and the radical wing of the PLO into negotiations, it will be because the centrist coalition has created an environment in which the alternatives are either a fair balance of Palestinian, Israeli, and Arab state interests or a future of growing isolation and irrelevance.

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